

REMARKS

Claims 1-5 and 8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Villarreal-Trevino et al., U.S. Patent 6,395,056. The Examiner cites the temperature range of 75° C to 1100° C (see col. 3, lines 36-36), which covers the range claimed in claim 1, which is “from about 200° C to about 500° C.”

The Applicants contend that the temperature range of 75° C to 1100° C (see col. 3, lines 36-36) is internally inconsistent with the rest of the patent, and that the actual range is 750° C to 1100° C, and that the lower temperature range of 75° C is a typographical error. Support for the contention can be found in col. 2, line 51, which teaches a range of 750° C to 1100° C. Claim 4 claims a pre-heating temperature range of 700° C to 800° C. Villarreal-Trevino et al. teach in col. 3, line 20, that the temperature of the particles exiting the pre-heating device is 700° C. Applicants assert that it is self evident that the particles could not attain this temperature if the pre-heating oven is only 75° C. Further support that the lower temperature range is actually 750° C, not 75° C, can be found in Villarreal-Trevino et al., Claims 1 and 2, wherein the temperature of the particles exiting the pre-heating device is above 600° C. Applicants argue that the Claim 1 limitation of 200° C to about 500° C is well outside the range as taught by Villarreal-Trevino et al., and the rejections of Claims 1-5 and 8 are respectfully overcome.

Claim 6 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Villarreal-Trevino et al. in view of Beggs et al., U.S. Patent 3,764,123. While Villarreal-Trevino et al. do not specially teach a means for heating the reformer by the combustion gas, this feature is conventional as evidenced by Beggs et al. The Examiner's position is that heating the reformer (38), which catalytically converts spent off-gases to reform gases, is functionally equivalent to heating equivalent to using the spent reform gases to provide heat in the pre-drying device.

Applicants have canceled claim 6.

Claim 7 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Villarreal-Trevino et al. in view of Beggs et al., and further in view of Becaerra-Novos et al., U.S. Patent 5,445,363.

Applicants have canceled claim 7.

Since the amendment to the claims does not add more claims than previously paid for, no additional fee is required, except for the fee for 3-month extension of time. A Petition and payment for a 3-month extension of time is enclosed.

In view of the foregoing amendment and these remarks, this Application is now believed to be in condition for allowance and such favorable action is respectfully requested on behalf of Applicants.

Respectfully submitted,



F. Rhett Brockington  
Patent Agent for the Applicants  
Registration No. 29,618  
Ralph H. Dougherty  
Attorney for the Applicants  
Registration No. 25,851  
DOUGHERTY CLEMENTS  
The Roxborough Building  
1901 Roxborough Road; Suite 300  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28211  
Telephone: (704) 366-6642

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